

Carcieri's challenges: Deficit, Democrats

Ray Henry
The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE — Republican Gov. Don Carcieri will be sworn into his second term today, facing a \$350 million deficit and fewer allies than ever in a Democrat-dominated legislature.

Carcieri, the state's 57th governor, is scheduled to stand up about noon on a Statehouse patio overlooking Providence, place his hand on a Bible and take the oath of office. The only Republican elected to a statewide post, the former school teacher and businessman will be flanked by Democrats on all sides.

Carcieri, formerly the chief executive officer for Cookson America, began four years ago as a political novice who emphasized his role as an outsider — a check against a General Assembly sullied by an ongoing influence-peddling probe and other scandals.

He'll be working with two lawmakers who left their Senate seats to run for executive office.

Lt. Gov.-elect Elizabeth Roberts, a former state Senator from Cranston, beat a former commander of the Rhode Island National Guard to earn her job, making her the only woman to hold statewide office in Rhode Island.

The Democrat is entering a political post that could offer her more visibility, but one that has few constitutional responsibilities.

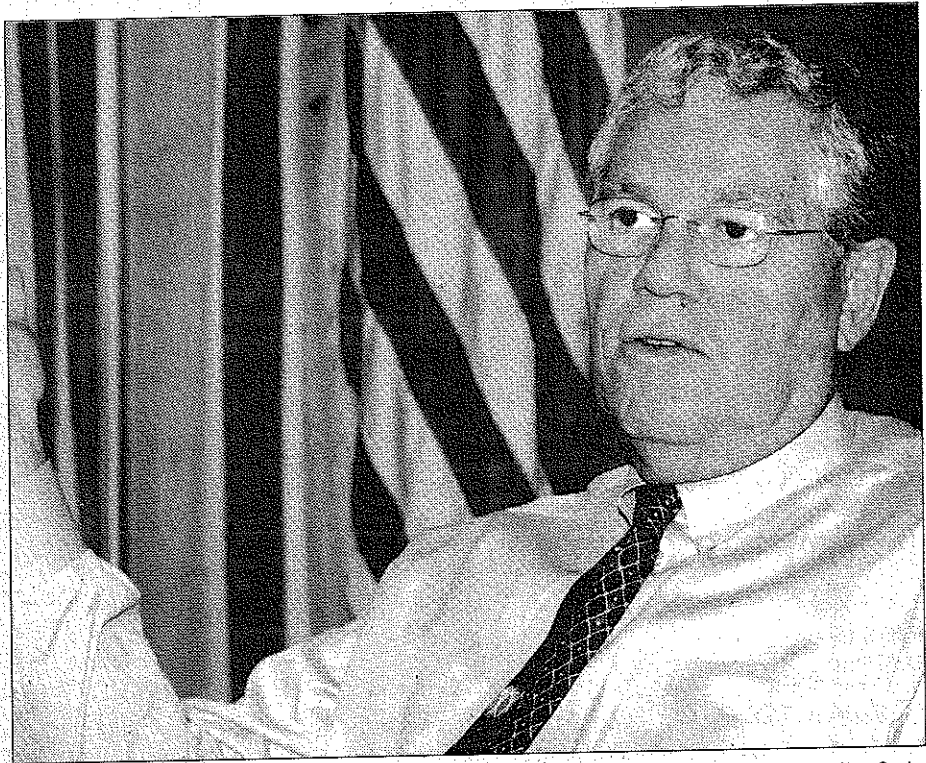
She formerly designed health care packages at Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and was one of the architects of a bill last year that created a cheap but slimmed-down health care plan designed for small businesses and workers who couldn't otherwise afford any coverage.

Roberts has promised to focus on making health care more affordable, and Carcieri has said he would be willing to work with her.

Today's inauguration also marks the beginning of Democrat Frank Caprio's term as general treasurer.

Democrats outnumber Republicans by better than two-to-one in the state, but the party isn't always a political monolith, and the Caprio family has bucked Democratic leaders before.

Caprio, an attorney, formerly worked for the Republican governor at Cookson America. He entered the Statehouse as a



Rich Dugas • Journal Register News Service

Gov. Donald Carcieri, seen here in an interview late last year, faces the task of solving a \$350 million deficit in the year ahead.

representative from Providence in 1991 and was elected to the state Senate three years later.

He chaired the powerful Senate Finance Committee from 2001-02 but later lost the seat. Caprio has alleged that Democratic leaders punished him for backing a constitutional amendment barring lawmakers from serving on executive boards and agencies, a measure that Carcieri backed.

His brother, Rep. David Caprio, D-Naragansett, led a faction of dissident Democrats allied with the Republican governor against Democrat House Speaker William Murphy, helping block a Democratic budget plan in 2004.

One notable absence this year is outgoing Secretary of State Matt Brown. The outgoing secretary of state traditionally administers the oath of office to the governor and lieutenant governor.

But Brown's campaign for a U.S. Senate seat imploded under a campaign finance scandal, and a spokesman said Brown would be on a family vacation during the inauguration ceremonies.

He is being replaced by North Providence Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, who won

the secretary of state's race after a bitter Democratic primary. After he's sworn in, Mollis is scheduled to administer the oath of office to lawmakers in the General Assembly.

Attorney General Patrick Lynch, who will swear in Carcieri and Roberts, will himself begin a second term. His office won a public nuisance lawsuit potentially worth billions of dollars against former lead paint manufacturers. But he was criticized for accepting plea deals from three defendants accused of contributing to a 2003 blaze at a West Warwick nightclub that killed 100 people and injured twice that many.

The newly elected officials plan to begin today with a Mass at the Providence Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul, where Catholic Bishop Thomas Tobin will preside and preach. A Congregationalist pastor from Roberts' church also will participate.

During the inauguration ceremony, Carcieri will receive a gorget, or a ceremonial neckplate signifying his role as commander in chief of the Rhode Island National Guard.